

Daisy Hill Road

An Honors Thesis (ART 480)

by

Kathryn L Major

Thesis Advisor

Jacinda Russell

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kathryn L Major', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Ball State University

Muncie, Indiana

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Abstract

This series addresses the revisitation of my childhood home on Daisy Hill Road. I photographed using medium format film in both color and black-and-white, which I scanned and printed on transparencies. The photos mostly feature forests and bodies of water with which I am familiar; when I had the opportunity to develop the film myself, I used water from the site as rinses in the development process. The prints are displayed on a large lightbox, signifying both innocence of childhood and hope that I may eventually shed the weight of depression I have dealt with in the past ten years.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Jacinda Russell for advising me through this project. Her help during the making of this body of work was only a small fraction of the help and guidance I received during my time in the photography department.

Other thanks go to Mark Sawrie for his guidance and criticisms over the years, and my classmates for their encouragements and camaraderie.

Daisy Hill Road
Author's Statement

Going home is both a joy and a disappointment. Some things are exactly as I remember them. Others—many others—have changed almost beyond recognition. Until the age of 12, I grew up on fifty acres of tree farm, which bordered a state forest. I had a free childhood, often hiking, swimming, and helping my family tend the garden and orchard. In light of the trials of my time in high school and college, simultaneously battling depression and a father who denied that the mental illness existed, the time before we moved away from that idyllic place was like heaven. Now when I go back, I find the paths that used to be clear from frequent use grown over. The land that was so carefully cultivated has fallen back to wilderness. Worst of all, the garden, house, and barn are messy and slouching under the care of people taken with the idea of living in the country but having no idea how to actually live there.

I photographed my childhood home on Daisy Hill Road. I used medium format film in both color and black-and-white, which I scanned and printed on transparencies. The photos mostly feature forests and bodies of water with which I am familiar; when I had the opportunity to develop the film myself, I used water from the site as rinses in the development process. The prints are displayed on a large lightbox, signifying both innocence of childhood and hope that I may eventually shed the weight of depression I have dealt with in the past ten years.

This series addresses the revisitation of my childhood home in the hopes of regaining a joyful, innocent view of the world as I prepare to move forward into my future. With it, I visually share the memories of places where I explored and had adventures. In these places, I experienced joy, grief, rapture, fear, and a sense of unconditional belonging and love. My childhood was rich of wonderful experiences, and carefree in the relative isolation of where we lived.

A series I made in the spring of 2012, *Across the Street*, dealt with a period of severe clinical depression and self-harm from the ages of 13 to 20. The purpose of *Daisy Hill Road* is to eventually frame *Across the Street* between the past light of my carefree childhood and the hope of the future. *Daisy Hill Road* and *Across the Street* are the first two installments of what I hope to be a life-long body of work visually outlining chapters of my life.

Paradise
27/12/2008

I spent the day in paradise.
Paradise is damp and foggy;
but who would have guessed
that a roaring chainsaw and falling rain
could sound such sweet harmony?
And branches that crackle underfoot
add a resounding counter melody.

Gasoline is tangy,
cherry wood smells sweet.
Walnut's colored black as asphalt,
chestnut's brown like winter leaves.

Though I've grown up and gone away,
in my heart I long to be
flying above the ground
and under the canopy;
a child of the wilderness,
running fast and free.

Daisy Hill Road, as the place where I grew up, serves as a mental haven, even now, years after I've moved away. Many of the happiest years I've lived were spent there, before the age of 12. Since I only spent my formative years, it could be said that my memory and fondness is skewed in its favor because I didn't suffer the trials of adolescence there. Indeed, as much as I suffered from the scorn of my classmates in my new school, it surely would have been much worse had we stayed. Such as it is, though, I always breathe easier when I spend time in the woods where I grew up. I always have, and I believe I always will.

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I photographed my childhood on Daisy Hill Road. I used medium format film in both color and black-and-white, which I scanned and printed on transparencies. The photos mostly feature forests and bodies of water with which I am familiar; when I had the opportunity to develop the film myself, I used water taken from the site as rinses in the development process. Although it may appear at first glance that the photographs presented are merely pretty pictures of an autumn landscape, each one is laden with significance. Together, they form a narrative of specific locations attached to memories that are dear to my heart. For example, the general store that had the best cheese, and Dry Fork, the hollow between the hills, where we whiled away countless summer days.

When thinking about how to display these photographs, I kept coming back to the idea of light. Since I am working to overcome nearly a decade of dealing with depression, I felt driven from the beginning to use light as a metaphor for hope. From there, I began to think about my life. At what time had I felt the most alive, and the least burdened by this inky blackness that resides inside me? The years before the age of 12 stuck in my mind, and with that came thoughts of where I spent those years: the house on Daisy Hill Road. The light gained an additional meaning—that of childhood innocence. To this end, the prints are displayed, attached with magnets, on a large, 4'x8'x4' light box constructed with ¼" white plexiglass and lit from the inside with Tungsten photography bulbs.



Daisy Hill Road
Installation photos
2012

Although there are sixty individual photographs, the display in its entirety is one cohesive work. Larger than life and seemingly floating, the light emitted from this structure beckons the viewer to come closer. On its surfaces 12 photographs sized 16"x16" are displayed, along with 12 sized 10"x10", and 36 measuring 5"x5". The intimate size of the photographs compared to the white monolith of the lightbox is an invitation to both inspect the individual images closely and step back to take in the structure as a whole, as an object of light, shadow, and color. To allow light to shine through the images, I printed my photographs on transparency.

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The purpose of these photographs is to eventually frame the dark period of my life addressed in my previous series *Across the Street* between the past light of my blithe childhood and the hope of the future. *Across the Street* dealt with a period of severe clinical depression and self-harm from the ages of 13 to 20. *Daisy Hill Road* and *Across the Street* are the first two installments of what I hope to be a life-long body of work visually outlining chapters of my life.

The house and land on Daisy Hill Road represent my personal brand of escapism, and embody the opportunity to relive my childhood. For many pseudo-adults my age, reliving childhood means something quite different, and it usually involves video games. Regardless of the medium, many members of my generation practice some form of escapism to deal with (or avoid dealing with) the stress of day-to-day life. My father's property on Daisy Hill was my whole world, and largely a good environment for a child to grow up. So it's no wonder that when I want to escape the world, in an ideal situation, I would go there.

As more and more artists deal with intensely personal topics in their art, the art world as a whole gravitates toward the stories of the individual that are at once both personal and indicative of the human condition. The driving need to express oneself is present in many people who desire to make life more than simply surviving. Since childhood, I have been driven to pursue creative endeavors. I'm happiest when creating things and exploring new ideas.

Throughout this process, I've found a few artists who work with subject matter similar to mine, such as Yoshiko Seinosand, Ken Rosenthal, Rinko Kawauchi, and Susan Lipper. Common themes include story-telling, identity, nostalgia, and the reclamation of human spaces by nature.

First, I'd like to address a series of Ken Rosenthal's titled *The Forest*. On his website, he describes it thus:

"*The Forest* in part relates to a specific place, but is in essence an exploration of self. For me, it's the most complicated and personal work I've done. It is the first series I've made in which all of the images are landscapes. Yet it is not all about landscape. The landscapes merely stand for an internal space: one that is dense, layered, not easily navigated, and filled with myriad revelations waiting to be discovered."



Ken Rosenthal, #4964, *The Forest*, 2011

Like Rosenthal's *The Forest*, *Daisy Hill Road* is about the self, and the internal discovery or, in my case, rediscovery. The quality of light in some of his images can only be described as ethereal and the wildness of his subject matter resembles some of my own.

Susan Lipper's series *Off Route 80* deals with memories in a specific place, as described in the title. Her photographs have more of a human presence than Rosenthal's but they share the same quality of light.



Susan Lipper
Untitled
Off Route 80
2006-2011



Susan Lipper
Untitled
Off Route 80
2006-2011

Shadows dappled along the ground emphasize the clear path in one photograph, while in another the sun peeks out over the tree line, blanching the sky and swallowing the tops of the trees.

The work of Rinko Kawauchi also addresses aspects of nature, mostly in her native Japan. Landscapes make up a good portion of her series *Illuminance*. In one photograph is a sweeping landscape of waterfalls that splash into a lake below.



Rinko Kawauchi
Untitled from the series
Illuminance
2011



Rinko Kawauchi
Untitled from the series
Illuminance
2011

Another features a bed of plants laced with spiderwebs that caught the morning dew. Her photographs resemble mine in medium, as well – I shoot largely in medium format color film.

Yoshiko Seino is important in that she mainly focuses on spaces that were occupied by people, but have been abandoned. Over time, nature has begun to reclaim the space, as it has in my series.



Yoshiko Seino
Tokyo
1997

In my favorite photograph *Tokyo*, the swimming pool is dingy, with leaves floating in it, yet it reflects the tops of trees and the sky, and the whole exposure glows with warm light.

In the series *Daisy Hill Road*, one photo in particular stands out to which I have a narrative memory attached. The subject of this photograph still elicits little shivers of fear up my spine, in the best way possible.



Kathryn Major

Bloody Fingers' Shack

From the series *Daisy Hill Road*

2012

My father had a friend named Ray who hosted an annual Halloween party with his wife Jackie. When it got dark, all the costumed children piled into the hay wagon and the tractor jolted into gear with a puff of diesel smoke. As we chugged along through the field, we listened to Ray tell the story of Bloody Fingers. A man, deformed from birth and rejected by his family, lived in isolation in an old, run-down shack in the woods. When travelers stumbled on his abode, they were never heard from again. As we listened with rapt attention, our eyes eagerly searched the woods to find a point of light far in the distance—a lantern, hanging from the doorframe.

Drawing nearer, we saw a shadowy figure lurking inside the house (Ray's teenage son). It followed us from window to window inside the shack as we circled the building and as we left, we heard the roaring of a chainsaw, and the figure leapt out of a window to pursue us. Screaming in childish terror, we begged Ray to drive faster. He did—eventually—and we left Bloody Fingers behind. Upon arriving back at the house, we found and clung to our parents. After a few minutes of comfort, we calmed down and returned to the bonfire to roast apples.

Because of the memory of terror associated with this structure, I deliberately chose a low vantage point, with the building partially obscured by underbrush; this implies the gaze of a child trying not to disturb the monster inside. The exposure is dark, and the sky is forebodingly grey. While it's clear that the shack is empty, the overlap of windows and the splash of subdued yellow gives the suggestion of something inside. The clearing fades into darkness as it gives way to the trees that surround it.

In its own way, *Daisy Hill Road* has been just as therapeutic and helpful as *Across the Street*. It focused on the happy, healthy times in my life, rather than the dark and harmful ones. Moving forward, I'm leaving behind the places where I spent both of those periods of my life. I hope to take the happy memories with me, and let them influence my life in positive ways. After years of battling depression, I believe I'm finally coming out on the other side, and the photographs I've taken have helped take me there.

Bibliography

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Goto, Yumi. "Rinko Kawauchi's Illuminance." *Lightbox*. Time, 11 Apr. 2011. Web. 28 Nov. 2012. <<http://lightbox.time.com/2011/04/11/>>.

Lipper, Susan. "Susan Lipper." *Susan Lipper*. N.p., 2011. Web. 28 Nov. 2012.

Rosenthal, Ken. "Ken Rosenthal : The Forest." *Ken Rosenthal : The Forest*. N.p., 2011. Web. 28 Nov. 2012.

Kathryn Major
Daisy Hill Road
Inventory

4'x8'x4' white plexiglass box
wooden internal structure
2 500W, 3200K Tungsten lightbulbs
12 16"x16" archival inkjet transparency prints
12 10"x10" archival inkjet transparency prints
36 5"x5" archival inkjet transparency prints



Kathryn Major

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Education

2012 B.F.A. Fine Arts, emphasis in Photography, Ball State University, Muncie, IN USA

Selected Group Exhibitions

2012 *Daisy Hill Road*, BFA Thesis, Atrium Gallery, Ball State University, Muncie, IN USA

2012 *The World is Ending*, The Cup, Muncie, IN USA

2012 *Across the Street*, Cornerstone Center for the Arts, Muncie, IN USA

2010 *November Exhibition*, Art and Soul by Phoebe Gallery, Muncie, IN USA

2010 *October Exhibition*, Art and Soul by Phoebe Gallery, Muncie, IN USA

2008 *Videohaus*, Refreshed Design Studio, Muncie, IN USA

Publications and Documentary

2012 Aaron Webster Untitled Documentary on *Across the Street*

2008 *Frozen Lake and Giant*, Ball State University Honors College publication *The Odyssey*

Awards and Residencies

2012 Eric Poppleton Scholarship, Ball State University Art Department

2007-2012 Presidential Scholarship through Ball State University Honors College

Lectures

2012 Lecture on *Across the Street*, Cornerstone Center for the Arts, Muncie, IN USA

Kathryn Lucinda Major
Born: Jeffersonville, IN
Clark Memorial Hospital

1989	Kathryn Lucinda Major born April 25th at 8:03 AM
1990	Participated in first and only fashion show
1991	Tricycle races around new front porch
1992	Father built zip line from porch to tree fort
1993	Received first musical instrument for fourth birthday: penny whistle
1994	Started kindergarten and piano lessons
1995	Had the best first grade teacher ever: Miss Cindy
1996	Learned recorder in music class; hated it
1997	Played penny whistle in first school talent show
1998	Began learning violin in school orchestra
1999	Began playing clarinet in school band; moved and began private lessons
2000	Briefly played trombone in new school's band
2001	First paid music performance at Jasper, IN Tannenbaum Days
2002	Played clarinet in Owensboro Youth Orchestra
2003	Earned first chair in clarinet section as a high school freshman; kept it until graduation
2004	Bought first camera: Minolta SR-T 101. Began teaching herself photography
2005	Diagnosed with clinical depression
2006	Played clarinet in Evansville Youth Orchestra
2007	Graduated from high school; began college as a music education major
2008	Realised music education was making her miserable
2009	Transitioned majors from music to art; accepted to BSU's art program
2010	Took first official photography class
2011	Applied for several local photo assistant jobs; didn't get any of them
2012	First major show of artwork at Cornerstone Center for the Arts in Muncie, IN; graduated with her BFA in Photography from Ball State University; displayed her thesis series <i>Daisy Hill Road</i>

Kathryn Major
Daisy Hill Road

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